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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KCRM](#) [PTER](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: SENIOR STATESMAN YEARNs FOR "LOCKERBIE" SOLUTION
TO TRIBUNAL

Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador, per 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Octogenarian senior statesman Fouad Boutros hosted the Ambassador to a one-on-one lunch on 1/9. Boutros (who has held public positions from the 1940s until his recent stint as head of the electoral reform commission) expressed deep concern that Lebanon is being destroyed because of the tribunal. Syria, Boutros said, will simply not accept the tribunal, and the international community should be honest about the price being paid, which he suggested is excessively high. Boutros' proposed solution is one that has been raised tentatively but increasingly here: a Lockerbie-type solution, by which Syria turns over certain officials. Bashar al-Asad would not be touched, in return for Asad's commitment to cease murder, mayhem, and interference in Lebanon. The Ambassador told Boutros that he found unrealistic the concept of Syria sincerely stopping its interference in Lebanon without the real accountability a genuine tribunal would bring. End summary.

CURRENT SITUATION BLACK,
EVEN BY BOUTROS' STANDARDS

2. (C) Boutros -- deeply respected for more than 60 years of public service and famed in Lebanon for unrelenting bleakness -- opened his discussion with the Ambassador by noting that, of all the mistakes he had made in his long life, one was particularly regrettable: "I was never pessimistic enough." No one, he said, could have envisioned just how terrible the current situation is and will still become. PM Siniora is excellent, but "they" (the opposition) do not want excellence. And Siniora cannot continue to govern without Shia representation, lest he turn a manipulated opposition into something more genuine and dangerous.

SYRIA WILL DESTROY LEBANON
TO STOP TRIBUNAL

3. (C) Let's be honest, Boutros said, the elephant in the room is the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. Syria will not stand for it. It does not matter whether one talks of creating the tribunal by Chapter VII, the Lebanese parliament, or the Lebanese cabinet: Syria will destroy Lebanon to ensure that the tribunal is never operational. Nearly everything that is happening now is because of the

tribunal. The price Lebanon will pay for the tribunal is excessive, higher than the value of the tribunal itself. Citing years of dealing with Syria, he said that "you are playing with fire, and we will be burned." The situation here will continue to deteriorate, with Syria willing to provoke civil war in order to make an operational tribunal impossible.

SEEKING "LOCKERBIE" SOLUTION

¶4. (C) Boutros argued that it is time to search for a "Lockerbie" solution to the tribunal. The United States should not talk to Syria -- he spoke approvingly of the U.S. refusal to deal with Bashar al-Asad ("who calls people 'half men' but has less than half a brain himself") -- but someone should, "maybe Turkey." Bashar should agree to give up someone like Syrian Military Intelligence official Rustom Ghazaleh to the tribunal and commit Syria to cease its interference in Lebanon. "No more murders and no more bombs; our parliament chooses our president," Boutros explained. In return, Bashar and his immediate family get spared the tribunal. It will not be a rehabilitation of Syria but rather acceptance that the regime will continue.

¶5. (C) The Ambassador noted that Boutros is widely praised for his bleak realism. Yet what he suggested seemed wildly optimistic: does anything in recent history suggest that Bashar is prepared to let Lebanon alone? The accountability that the tribunal should bring -- if Syria is indeed guilty -- is an essential tool to persuade Syria to cease killing Lebanese public figures. Even if the Syrians could make a Lockerbie-type commitment in good faith, they did not hint at any such possibility when meeting recently with foreign visitors. Instead, the Syrians opposed discussing the

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tribunal at all. Most importantly, the Ambassador noted, there does not seem to be any interest at all among March 14 leaders in Lebanon to pursue anything less than the truth -- and March 14 leaders are convinced that Syrian culpability, particularly for the "relatives crimes," goes beyond a single Syrian security chief. The United States supports the tribunal fully and backs the Lebanese desire to know the truth.

¶6. (C) Boutros agreed that MP Saad Hariri, in particular, would have to be convinced that a Lockerbie-style solution was good. And, yes, there would have to be verifiable benchmarks to confirm that Syria was ceasing its Lebanon interference. But there is no choice but to try, lest "we lose Lebanon." He said that he planned to meet in the coming days with March 14 figures to test his idea. The Ambassador said that the USG is likely to support a solution that has a broad Lebanese consensus, but we want to see the tribunal go forward.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) Boutros, Lebanon's most senior statesman, is not a closet pro-Syrian or Aounist. For example, he has for more than a year rebuffed Aoun's requests to pay a call, telling others that "if I were to listen to that madman, people would think I'm a madman myself." In addition, his proposed electoral law reform -- one of Aoun's principal objectives -- is out of tune with the thinking of Aoun and his supporters. So we judge his call for a "Lockerbie" solution as a sincere proposal to protect Lebanon, not to protect Syria. Nevertheless, we find the idea grounded in wishful thinking, for the reasons we shared with Boutros. Marwan Hamadeh has argued that a Lockerbie-style approach isn't worth pursuing because of the sectarian differences between Libya and Syria: if anyone in the Syrian regime is convicted of killing a Sunni leader like Hariri, then the Sunni majority of Syria will react against the Alawites no matter what deals were cut

ahead of time with the international community. So Bashar does not have the option open to him that Qaddafi did, Hamadeh argues. (We are merely passing on Hamadeh's analysis and defer to Embassy Damascus for more authoritative comment.)

18. (C) Nonetheless, Boutros' arguments are being made by others as well -- still tentatively but with increasing frequency -- including by March 14 figures. If the pro-Syrian March 8-Aounist forces prove able to escalate the demonstrations (despite so far disappointing -- for them -- labor strikes), or if additional public figures are murdered, we expect that more people will start to ask whether the tribunal is really worth it. Hizballah leaders -- breaking a long-standing public taboo about questioning the tribunal -- have already started asking their followers whether Rafiq Hariri's death is really that much sacred and worthy of justice than 1,200 people killed in the Israeli-Hizballah conflict last summer. In a disturbing development, we have heard a few March 14 sympathizers parrot this line back to us.
FELTMAN